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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses moderate- to long-term psychological effects of child abuse. It begins by discussing characteristics of effective and ineffective parenting to provide a background of potential contributors to child abuse within the family system. Belsky's (1984) developmental model of determinants of parenting behavior is explained and his three categories of determinants of parenting (personality/psychological well-beingness of the parent, child characteristics, and contextual events) are discussed. This discussion is followed by an examination of some issues surrounding the methodology of child abuse research, including the basic problem of developing operational definitions of child abuse. Also considered is the issue of validity of reports of alleged abuse by either victim or perpetrator. The evolution of research on child abuse is traced through three stages: focus on alleged victims only, focus on comparing alleged victims with nonabused persons, and random samplings to ascertain frequency. Finally, recent literature on relatively long-term effects of prior abuse is considered. Comments are offered with respect to the diversity of opinion of effects of prior abuse and prior abuse is considered in terms of the uniqueness or peculiarity of its sequelae. A list of 26 references is included. (NB)

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A Review of Recent Literature on Child Abuse and Sequelae

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Abstract

This paper addresses moderate to long-term psychological effects of child abuse. First, characteristics of effective and ineffective parenting is discussed to provide a background of potential contributors to child abuse within the family system. Secondly, some issues with respect to research on child abuse will be presented. Thirdly, literature addressing moderate to long-term psychological sequelae of child abuse will be presented and summary statements will be made.

A Review of Recent Literature on Child Abuse and Sequelae

This paper first briefly addresses parenting. In that child abuse occurs in some family context the relationship seems obvious. Next, some issues surrounding the methodology of child abuse research will be identified, including the basic problem of operational definitions of child abuse. Finally, recent literature on relatively long-term effects of prior abuse will be addressed. In conjunction with this latter phase, some comments will be offered with respect to the diversity of opinion of effects of prior abuse; additionally, prior abuse will be considered in terms of the uniqueness or peculiarity of its sequelae.

Belsky (1984) presented a developmental model of determinants of parenting behavior. His model, derived at least in part from research on child abuse and neglect, may be considered in the context of antecedents of child abuse as well as of desirable or appropriate parenting behavior. Clearly no one parenting behavior variable or factor is necessary and sufficient as cause of abusive or neglectful behavior nor is any single event invariably associated with such outcome behavior.

Belsky identified three categories of determinants of parenting, each on a continuum with behavior at one end conducive to the child's cognitive-motivational competence and healthy

socioemotional development; at the other end lie behaviors reflecting child abuse and neglect. The first category of determinants is the personality/psychological well-beingness of the parent. Parents showing childrearing practices conducive to optimal child development are attentive, warm, stimulating, responsive, and sensitively attuned to the child's capabilities and developmental tasks. Parent characteristics associated with child abuse and neglect are depression, especially in the mothers; the experience of abuse in the (now) parents' own childhood; the separation of the (now) parents from his/her parent as a child; (now) fathers who had neither very high nor very low involvement with their own fathers in childhood (high-involved fathers show nurturance; low involved fathers attempt compensation). Both Belsky and Zuravin (1988) identified young mothers (i.e., teenage) as more likely to be abusive than other mothers. Peters (1988) also reported that contact sexual abuse was negatively related to maternal warmth in mother-child interaction; maternal warmth was not associated with noncontact sexual abuse. Inconsistency of parenting behavior is considered a key factor in child abuse (Steele, 1986).

The second category of determinants of parenting identified by Belsky was child characteristics. The primary event associated with child abuse was the child's "temperament," expecially during the first three months of life. The "hard" child was more likely

to have been abused than was the "easy" child.

Belsky's third category of determinants of parenting was that of contextual events -- social/emotional support within and outside the family, especially for mothers; instrumental assistance; and social expectations. A prime variable is the quality of the marital relationship; this seemed especially true with a father's perceptions of support from the wife. Perceptions of strong wife support was related to child care and nurturance.

Parenting behavior evolves from the interaction of these three sets of determinants. Parenting, then, is a buffered system. Weaknesses in any one determinant may be compensated by the others. When two of the three determinants are at risk, problems are likely. Belsky suggested that the single most important determinant was the parents' own psychological wellbeing and that the least important of the three was the child's characteristics.

The application of Belsky's model has been addressed by Emery (1989) in the broader context of family violence.

Addressing research on child abuse and neglect must include comments on the methodology employed. Methodological critique includes, probably first, the issue of operational definitions of child abuse (Lamphear, 1985; Ammerman, Cassisi, Hersen, & Van Hasselt (1986); Augoustinos, 1987). A sub-aspect of definition is the issue of validity of reports of alleged abuse by either victim or perpetrator. Beyond operational definitions, methodology of

research on child abuse has evolved through three stages. First was focus on alleged victims only (univariate or bivariate rates of psychological reactions, usually in female subjects). Secondly, focus on comparing alleged victims with nonabused persons who appear at hospitals, in therapy, etc. (assessment of psychological symptoms in representative populations). Thirdly, random samplings from a population to ascertain frequency, to provide for matching quasi-experimental groups and control subjects (establishing the prevalence of particular diagnoses in populations and use of multivariate techniques) (Stein, Golding, Siegel, Burnham, & Sorenson (1988). The latter approach was well-exemplified by Murphy, Kilpatrick, Amick-McMullan, Veronen, Paduhovich, Best, Villeponteaus, & Saunders (1988). All may be in the context of ascertaining effects of the alleged abuse. Even in recent research the absence of matched controls has been critiqued (Lamphear, 1985; Augoustinos, 1987) as limiting the conclusions which may be drawn (Ammerman, et. al., 1986). Longitudinal studies are few in number (Lamphear, 1985). A disproportionately high emphasis may have been placed -- at least in frequency of published studies -- on alleged female victims rather than on both sexes and on alleged sexual abuse rather than on other kinds of abuse (e.g., verbal or physical). I purport neither to defend nor to reject as meaningless any research on definitional or methodological grounds

but to recommend reading with discernment with reference to one's own concern at the time.

Beyond definitional and methodological considerations, the publications on child abuse also deal with the issue of the extent of possible negative effects of abuse on development. At the extremes, opinions have been expressed that abuse may have some potentially positive effects to the intermediate ideal that abuse is not inherently harmful to the (other extreme) that abuse is almost invariantly destructive (Ammerman, et. al., 1986). Steele (1986; 1987) has asserted that physical abuse does not necessarily cause trouble (1986, p. 283) and that many persons subjected to isolated, nonrepetitive abuse grow up to be essentially healthy, "normal" adults (1987, p. 14) -- that frequency and duration are key variables. The concept of the "invulnerable child" and contributors to resilience have been addresses by Mrazek (1987). A specific syndromal pattern unique to (physical) abuse has not been found and neglect may be more detrimental to development than abuse (Ammerman, et. al., 1986). None the less, though the research on developmental effects of child abuse fails to cohere toward discrete results, sufficient clinical evidence supports the widely held assumption that abuse and neglect have deleterious effects (Augoustinos, 1987). Rosenthal (1987) quoted Yates with respect to impressions of functioning of abuse victims as "...the

child is an igloo, functioning...but without warmth" (p. 79). Reality likely lies somewhere between abuse's producing negligible to not necessarily harmful sequelae and that abuse is invariantly destructive. The preponderance of opinion, and likely of research findings also, is that the effects of abuse are in the direction of the latter, that is, toward the destructive end of a hypothetical continuum.

The material which follows describes briefly all the literature generated from PsycLit (1/83-3/89) using the locators, child-abuse and emotional-adjustment for which emotional or personality sequelae were identified as differences or of correlational significance in studies of abuse. Where available, indices of the magnitude of differences are included.

Briere & Runtz (1988) All females; Sexual Abuse; Long-term effects	Abused v. non-abused controls: variables showing differences (p levels): abused, more negative effects - Nightmares, sexual problems, fear of men (.0001); Battered as an adult (.0003); History of drug addiction (.0005); Anxiety attacks, derealization (.001) Currently on psychoactive medicine (.01); History of suicide (.03)
DiPietro (1987) All females onset x age = 9.2 yrs. end x age = 13.6 yrs.	Abused - nonabused sister; control - control sister. Multivariate evaluation of differences on Eysenck, Bell Adjustment, I-E Scale, Tennessee Self-Concept. Nonsignificant differences among the 4 groups. Post hoc t-tests; victim's sister v. control's sister difference (former more externally controlled)

Fromuth (1986)

All females

Long-term effects

A correlational study - addressing effect of abuse over predictions from Parental Support Scale. Significant addition of abuse on: Masturbation, homosexual experience, self-description as more promiscuous (behavior not supportive...), incidence of 10 or more episodes of non-contact sexual behavior during the month preceding data collection

Gold (1986)

All females

$\bar{x}$ ± 20 yrs. after abuse

The following were more pronounced for sexually abused than controls: Negative sexual symptoms, (fewer) positive responses to sexual invitations, (less) satisfaction with present sexual relationships; depression, (lower) self-esteem, in/have been in therapy, attribution style of internal, stable, and global

Johnson & Shrier (1987)

All males

$\bar{x}$ 20 yrs. after abuse

	1	2	3
Homosexual sexual identity	50%	27%	4%
Sexual dysfunction	29%	27%	4%
Perceived hi impact of abuse on life	64%	73%	NA

[(1) = male by male molestation; (2) male by female molestation; (3) nonabused controls. All percents rounded.]

McCormack, Janus, & Burgess (1986)

Males & Female runaways <1 mo. to >1 yr. after abuse

	Abused	Controls
Confused feelings about sex [females (only) differed]	43%	7%
Relationships with others		
Females: difficulties w/ girl friends	28%	13%
verbal fights	72%	60%
Males: withdrawal from friends	55%	40%
difficulty w/girls	36%	24%

McCormack, et. al. (1986) (continued)

		Abused	Controls
Males:	difficulty w/boys	48%	36%
	afraid of adult men	35%	13%
Emotional complaints			
	suicidal feelings (females)	53%	34%
	worried, tense - females	82%	67%
	males	82%	61%

Murphy, et. al. (1988)

All females

Long-term effects

$\bar{x}$ ± 20 yrs. after abuse

Victims (of completed or attempted rape, completed or attempted molestation, other) as (1) children, (2) adolescents, (3) adults, or (4) multiple times compared to (5) nonvictim controls.

Vernon-Kilpatrick Modified Fear Survey (nsd among groups)

Impact of Event Scale (4 assault groups) (nsd among groups)

Derogatis Symptom Checklist, SCL-90-R Multiple assault group higher than other groups on 11 of 12 scales (range of absolute differences, .24 - .47 on 0 - 1 scale). Other comparisons were mixed.

Generally, "...the direction of the correlation indicated that the more recent the assault, the higher the level of distress being measured" (p. 68). "...women who were sexually abused in childhood and later revictimized by an adult sexual assault have significantly higher levels of psychological distress than not only non-victims, but also childhood sexual abuse victims and adult sexual assault victims" (p. 73).

Ney (1987)

All females

long-term & short-term

--a correlational study of types of child mistreatment experienced by mothers and, in turn, their children--
"The mother tended to abuse her child as she was abused by her husband." Mothers who were verbally abused are more likely to abuse their children" (p. 374). ($r = .318$ for severity; .313 for frequency)

Mothers' estimate of how affected they were by abuse: verbal abuse had greater impact. (Σ ratings: verbal 545; physical 450; sexual 302)

Children: aggressive toward selves; pessimistic view of the future - $\chi^2 > .05$

Orr & Downes (1985)

All Females $\bar{X} \pm 5$ yrs. after abuse

On Offer Self-Image Questionnaire, Adolescents ($\bar{X}$ = 50, s.d. = 10)

Subscale	Abused Mean (Standard Deviation)	Nonabused Mean (Standard Deviation)	
Mastery of External world	33.0 (18.6)	48.4 (17.9)	p<.01
Vocational-Educational Goals	39.9 (18.6)	51.9 (20.3)	p<.03
Psychopathology	37.5 (17.5)	47.2 (15.8)	p<.04

Abused groups differed from published norms on above 3, plus (nonabused shown for comparison)

Sexual Attitudes	33.0 (21.9)	42.2 (22.2)
Family Relations	34.6 (22.0)	44.3 (17.4)
Superior Adjustment	39.5 (17.5)	45.9 (16.5)
Emotional Tone	40.3 (20.5)	46.8 (16.3)
Overall Adjustment	38.0 (18.4)	46.1 (19.6)

Peters (1988)

Females

Long-term

Abused v. nonabused controls (random in population. Differences [abused more negative (p value)]: Alcohol abuse (.01); probable drug abuse (.05); 1+ major depressive episode since age 18 (.05). Non-contact abuse Ss, nsd from controls on major depressive episodes.

Rosenthan (1988)

(theory)

"The most pernicious long-term effect of abuse and neglect may be the derailment of the development of self-esteem and the growth of injured narcissism" (p. 506).

Russell, Schurman, & Trocki (1988)

Females

Long-term

--a comparison of self-reports of Afros and Whites on severity and impact of incest. Afros perceived the relationship as "more extremely upsetting" and abuse at "very severe levels more than Whites."(Afros more likely abused by younger, consanguinous person than Whites and these two factors were related to severity of effects.)

Steele (1986)

No data

No references

--Abused are prone to low self-esteem, identity problems (developmental fixations); sensitivity and vulnerability to stress; lack of pleasure and depression; attachment disorders; sexual/social adjustment disorders.

Stein, Golding, Siegel, Burnham, & Sorenson (1988)

Both sexes

$\bar{X}$ ± 5 yrs. after

Abused v. nonabused--
Abused were more likely to abuse alcohol (not other drugs); to have anxiety disorders --phobias, panic (not obsessive-compulsive) sometime post-abuse
In the immediately prior 6 months, abused were more likely than nonabused to have had a major depressive episode or an anxiety disorder.

Tong, Oates, & McDowell (1987)

Females

$\bar{X}$ ± 2-6 yrs. abuse

Piers Harris Self-Concept Scale

	Abused	Nonabused
Females	49+	58+
Both Sexes	nsd	

(above are T-Scores: $\bar{X}$ = 50; sd = 10)

Pre-post abuse changes (based on interview with non-offending parent(s):

Abused: 76% - reduced confidence
30% - fewer friends
28% - played with friends less

(lower % - as more oversensitive, anxious, depressed; also more aggressive, antisocial, & under-controlled)

Child Abuse

Augoustinos (1987) reviewed earlier studies on effects of child abuse with methodological critique on physical and cognitive effects and predisposing factors to abuse. Some of her review material showed little effect, particularly in the short term, of abuse. Some review suggested physical and verbal abuse were more disruptive of some aspects of development than was sexual abuse. Moreover, neglect may be potentially more damaging than abuse. Other significant reviews of literature on effects of child abuse include Lampher (1985), Browne and Finkehor (1986), and Ammerman, et. al. (1987).

The most frequently appearing negative effects of child abuse include: reduced self-esteem, some feeling constructs associated with depression, some sort of sexual and/or social adjustment difficulties. Secondarily, one finds some propensity for substance abuse and increased probability of being in psychological distress including (but not restricted to) being in therapy. The magnitude of difference in occurence of the negative events between abused persons and various nonabused controls frequently was less than overwhelming, consistent with the assertion that a specific syndromal pattern unique to abuse has not been found (Ammerman, et. al., 1986). Moreover, the variables mentioned at the first of this paragraph may represent the frequency with which they have been the target of research as well as or in place of

their salience in developmental effects of abuse.

Child abuse, particularly intrafamilial and to a lesser extent extrafamilial, occurs with frequency and regularity in the face of cultural prohibitions. Clinical evidence points to negative effects of child abuse. Researchers are not sure that abuse alone is both necessary and sufficient to produce (particular) subsequent developmental problems. A significant other potential contributor to developmental problems is a maladaptive family structure. In studies of the effects of child abuse on later emotional/personality development, some variables have been inconsistent with respect to differences. Where statistically significant differences or correlations have been found they reflect more toward small differences than toward large differences (methodological difficulties notwithstanding). Perhaps the major effects of child abuse manifest themselves later in life than during the time spans which typically are studied. The same may hold, however, for other difficulties (than abuse) experienced in development by children and adolescents. In any event, attention must be given to identification of abuse victims as well as to victims of other dysfunctional developmental phenomena in order to optimize those individuals' development, hence, contributing to our social base of functional individuals.

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